ONTARIO PARKS

Aaron

Preliminary Park Management Plan

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Invitation to Comment

Ontario Parks is presently undertaking the development of a management plan for Aaron Provincial Park. As part of the planning process the Aaron Preliminary Park Management Plan is presented.

The preliminary plan contains proposed policies relating to resource stewardship, operations and development that will guide the management of Aaron over the next 20 years. After careful consideration of the background information collected and review of comments received, this document represents Ontario Parks' preferred policy for the park.

You are invited to review and comment on the preliminary management plan. All comments regarding the preliminary management plan should be submitted by *XXX* to the attention of:

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The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) is collecting your personal information and comments under the authority of Ontario's *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act*. Any personal information you provide (address, name, telephone, etc.) will be protected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, however your comments will become part of the record of consultation and may be shared with the general public. Your personal information may be used by the MNR to send you information about future MNR planning initiatives in the park area. If you have questions about the use of your personal information, please contact martin Pell, Dryden District Planner, at (807) 223-7540.

Table of Contents

CONTEXT
Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act 5
Statement of Environmental Values and the Environmental Bill of Rights 5
Planning Context 5
Aboriginal Context 5
1.0 INTRODUCTION 6
2.0 CLASSIFICATION 6
3.0 GOAL 7
4.0 OBJECTIVES 7
4.1 Protection Objective 7
4.1.1 Life Sciences 7
4.1.2 Earth Sciences 8
4.1.3 Cultural Resources 8
4.2 Recreation Objective 8
4.3 Heritage Appreciation Objective 9
4.4 Scientific Research Objective 9
5.0 BOUNDARY 9
6.0 ZONING 10
6.1 Development Zone 10
6.2 Access Zones 10
6.3 Natural Environment Zone 11
7.0 RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP POLICIES 11
7.1 Aboriginal uses of Natural Resources 11
7.2 Industrial / Commercial Uses 11
7.3 Land Management 12
7.4 Water Management 12
7.5 Forest Fire Management 12
7.6 Species at Risk 12
7.7 Vegetation 12
7.8 Wildlife 13
7.9 Fisheries 13
7.10 Cultural Resources 13
7.11 Research 14
7.12 Inventory and Monitoring 14
8.0 OPERATIONS POLICIES 14
8.1 Natural Heritage Education 14
8.1.1 Information 14
8.1.2 Park Interpretation 15
8.1.3 Outdoor Recreation 15
8.2 Recreation Management 15
8.2.1 Day-Use Areas 15
8.2.2 Campgrounds 16
8.2.3 Services for Visitors 16
8.2.4 Trails 16
8.2.5 Mechanized Travel 16
8.3 Partnerships 16
9.0 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS 16
9.1 Marketing 16
9.2 Communications 17

10.0 DEVELOPMENT POLICIES 17
10.1 Campgrounds / Campsites 17
10.2 Roads 17
10.3 Day Use Area 17
10.4 Trails 17
10.5 Maintenance and Administrative Areas 17
11.0 IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES 17
12.0 SUMMARY OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION 18
13.0 PLAN AMENDMENT and REVIEW 18
14.0 REFERENCES 18

Appendix I SPECIES LIST 21

List of Figures

Figure 1: ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PROCESS 11
Figure 2: REGIONAL SETTING 22
Figure 3: ADJACENT LAND USE 23
Figure 4: PARK ZONING 24

CONTEXT

Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act

The *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act* (PPCRA) is the legislation that guides the planning and management of the protected areas system. The PPCRA has two specific principles that guide all aspects of planning and management of Ontario's system of provincial parks and conservation reserves:

- Maintenance of ecological integrity shall be the first priority and the restoration of ecological integrity shall be considered
- Opportunities for consultation shall be provided. 2006, c. 12, s. 3

Statement of Environmental Values and the Environmental Bill of Rights

The Ministry of Natural Resources' *Statement of Environmental Values* (SEV) under the *Environmental Bill of Rights* (EBR) describes how the purposes of the EBR are to be considered whenever decisions are made in the Ministry that might significantly affect the environment. This includes decisions made as a result of preparing management direction for a protected area.

The Ministry's SEV has been considered throughout the planning process. The management direction for Aaron Provincial Park will further the objectives of managing Ontario's resources on an environmentally sustainable basis.

Planning Context

This preliminary park management plan has been prepared consistent with direction contained in *Our Sustainable Future, Ministry of Natural Resources Strategic Directions* (2005). The Ministry's vision is "sustainable development" and the mission is "ecological sustainability". The Ontario Parks program contributes mainly to the goal of: "Healthy Natural Environment for Ontarians". The mandate of the Ministry for Ontario Parks is to deliver Ontario's parks and protected areas program, which includes: the protection and management of provincially significant natural, cultural, and recreational environments; provincial parks operations; provision of tourism opportunities, natural heritage education; planning and management of parks and protected areas; policy leadership on conservation reserves; monitoring, auditing, and public reporting on Ontario's parks and protected areas.

This document has also been prepared consistent with direction contained in *Protecting What Sustains Us: Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy* (2005). Ontario's parks and protected areas contribute to the achievement of the first goal "Protect the genetic, species and ecosystem diversity of Ontario", and the second goal "Use and develop the biological assets of Ontario sustainably, and capture benefits from such use for Ontarians".

Aboriginal Context

Wabigoon Lake, Wabauskang, Grassy Narrows (English River), Eagle Lake, Ojibway Nation of Saugeen, and Lac Seul First Nations are all within the boundary described by the Treaty #3 (Figure 1).

Aaron Provincial Park overlaps traditional lands and waters of these six Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal communities use the area for hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering and travel.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Aaron Provincial Park, established in 1958 under Ontario regulation 382/01, is a recreation class park of 117 hectares. The park is located in Zealand Township, on the TransCanada Highway (Hwy 17) east of Dryden, on the south shore of Thunder Lake (Figure 2). The park is located within Ecodistrict 4S-4 and the Dryden Administrative District of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). Area First Nation communities include Wabigoon Lake, Wabauskang, Grassy Narrows (English River), Eagle Lake, Saugeen, and Lac Seul. These First Nations are all within the boundary described by Treaty #3.

In the 1880s, the Canadian Pacific Railway was constructed adjacent to the present day location of Aaron Provincial Park, and the area was opened up for settlement. The park was originally a homestead sold to John D. Aaron in 1906, which eventually reverted to the Crown. The recreational value of the site was recognized and the Department of Northern Development established it as a work campsite park in 1935 for travellers and local residents.

Aaron Provincial Park is comprised of three parcels of land (Park Zoning Figure 4). Highway 17 divides the park into two main parcels. Canadian Pacific Railway has a patent right-of-way that divides the southwest corner of the park into the third, smallest parcel. TransCanada Pipeline has an easement through the park on the south side of the highway. A Hydro One / Ontario Power Generation (OPG) transmission line runs through the park to supply power to the residents of East Thunder Lake Road.

The park is on Thunder Lake, a remnant of the ancient glaciers that covered Ontario tens of thousands of years ago. As these massive moving fields of ice shifted and melted, they left behind a huge lake called glacial Lake Agassiz. Over the years, Lake Agassiz receded, creating hundreds of smaller lakes. The park's mixed forests of aspen, jack pine, white cedar and balsam fir, are typical of the boreal region. The forest is home to moose, white-tailed deer and black bear.

Aaron Provincial Park is an operating park with 98 campsites, 39 of which have electrical hook-ups. The campground and day-use areas are operated by the City of Dryden in partnership with the MNR-Ontario Parks. Aaron is a destination for local residents from Dryden and a stopover for travellers on Highway 17. Two sandy beaches, playground equipment and the clear, shallow waters of Thunder Lake make Aaron ideal for water based activities, such as, swimming, boating and fishing.

The approved park management plan will guide the stewardship, operation and development of Aaron over the next 20 years. Amendments may be considered as the need arises. The plan will be examined every 10 years to determine the need for further review or amendments, as described in Section 13).

Aaron Provincial Park Preliminary Management Plan has been developed in accordance with the Ontario Provincial Parks Planning and Management Policies (1992), Ontario's Living Legacy Land Use Strategy (1999) and Ontario's Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act. In accordance with this plan, MNR will amend affected area-specific land use policies and mapping found in the Crown Land Use Policy Atlas.[1]

2.0 CLASSIFICATION

Through park classification, Ontario's provincial parks are organized into broad categories, each of which has particular purposes and characteristics.

Aaron is classified as a recreational park. Recreational class parks support a wide variety of compatible outdoor recreation

[1] The Crown Land Use Policy Atlas can be found at the following: http://crownlanduseatlas.mnr.gov.on.ca/.

opportunities in attractive natural surroundings. The target for recreational class parks is to provide residents and out-of-province visitors with appropriate levels of day use and facility-based camping opportunities. The selection (and operation) of recreational class parks and the provision of compatible outdoor recreation opportunities is related to regional population distribution and demands.

3.0 GOAL

To provide a variety of opportunities for compatible heritage appreciation, outdoor recreation, and scientific research activities in attractive surroundings, while protecting the park's earth and life science features.

In fulfilling this goal, the park contributes to the achievement of recreation and protection objectives for the protected area system.

4.0 OBJECTIVES

There are four objectives for Ontario's parks: *protection*, *recreation*, *heritage appreciation* and *scientific research*.

4.1 Protection Objective

To permanently protect the park's biodiversity and elements of the natural and cultural landscape of Ontario and to manage these to ensure that ecological integrity is maintained.

Ontario's protected areas play an important role in representing and conserving the diversity of the province's natural features and ecosystems. Protected areas include representative examples of life and earth science features, and cultural heritage features within ecologically or geologically defined regions. Ontario's ecological classification system provides the basis for the life science feature assessment, and the geological themes provide the basis for earth science assessment.

4.1.1 Life Sciences

Aaron is located on the eastern boundary of ecodistrict 4S-4 near the southern margin of the Boreal Forest Region. Rowe (1972) describes this section as marking a transition between the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest to the south and the Boreal Forest to the north.

Although the park is in a transitional ecodistrict, the vegetation in the park is largely characteristic of the boreal forest. The vegetation found in the park reflects the park's transitional position between the two forest regions. Forest cover within the park consists of mature to old jack pine on coarse, well-drained sand deposits, with trembling aspen as an associate in areas where soil moisture is higher. Mixedwoods occupy sites with fine-textured materials; balsam fir, jack pine, trembling aspen, white birch, and black spruce. Shoreline vegetation includes white cedar and black ash; tree species that are found near the dam on the Thunder River (Noble 1977).

The wildlife of Aaron is representative of the boreal forest region. Mammals include moose, white-tailed deer, black bear and gray wolf, as well as Canada lynx, pine marten, red fox, snowshoe hare, river otter, and beaver.

The birds of the park are typical of the Boreal Forest and include a wide variety of songbirds, raptors, shorebirds and waterfowl.

The life science features of Aaron Provincial Park are not considered to contribute to any life science themes due to the small size and high degree of disturbance of the park.

4.1.2 Earth Sciences

Aaron is located within the Canadian Shield and the terrain is generally rolling with some

exposed bedrock. Aaron is underlain directly by Precambrian bedrock, consisting of highly foliated Keewatin sedimentary rocks (arkose, greywacke and quartzite) and volcanic rocks (intermediate to basic lavas) of the Wabigoon subprovince, Superior Province. The bedrock, exposed intermittently throughout the park, occurs as gentle knolls, often severely weathered or poorly exposed. Shoreline outcrops are abrupt and broken but generally low.

Surface deposits are of intermediate thickness (several metres), covering most of the park. The deposits consist predominantly of fine sand and silt with hard clay in drainage depressions and bedrock basins. The sands form a gently sloping to flat plain on which the campgrounds are built. What may be a tombolo (spit) joins the bedrock exposures on the peninsula to the main sand/silt plain. The surface deposits were produced predominantly during the Timiskaming Interstadial and represent glacial lake Agassiz and the Hartman Phase (10,000 years ago) of the retreating ice mass.

The earth science features of Aaron Provincial Park are not considered to contribute to any earth science themes due to their small size and high degree of disturbance (Kor 1977).

4.1.3 Cultural Resources

Cultural resources include any resource or feature of archaeological, historical, cultural, or traditional use significance. This may include archaeological resources, built heritage or cultural heritage landscapes (See Section 7.10).

4.2 Recreation Objective

To provide visitors with opportunities for car camping and day-use with ecologically sustainable land and water based recreation and to encourage associated economic benefits.

Aaron offers opportunities for car camping in the campground. The park provides campers and day-visitors with opportunities for hiking, swimming, picnicking, fishing and boating. The majority of visitors to Aaron (64%) are drawn from travellers on the Highway 17, who use the park as a stopover en route, as well as by local and regional residents, who use the park as a camping and day-use destination.

Most visitors to Northwest zone parks are from other provinces (western Canada) (36.6%), from northwestern Ontario (51.5%) and from the United States (11.9%), specifically Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan (Ontario Parks 2006). This is in contrast to the origins of park users on a province-wide basis where the majority of park visitors came from southwestern Ontario (20.6%), central Ontario (37.4%), Metro Toronto (11.3%) and eastern Ontario (16.4%), 5.4% originated in other provinces and 3.6% of visitors came from the United States (Ontario Parks 2006).

The 2005 Park User Survey indicates that, in general, most visitors to Aaron engage in resting/ relaxing (94%), followed by swimming/wading (81%), trail hiking (62%), viewing/ photographing nature (47%), picnicking (44%), and visiting viewpoints/lookouts (41%) (Ontario Parks 2006).

In 2007, the average length of stay for campers was 1.6 nights. The average party size was 3 and the July/August occupancy rate averaged 55% (Ontario Parks 2008).

Day-users (approximately 20% of users) are local residents, mostly from the Dryden area (Ontario Parks 2008). Some of the day-users visiting Aaron are tourists travelling the TransCanada Highway who visit as one of several destinations or as an unplanned

stopover en route. Day-users visiting Aaron are members of family groups participating in picnicking, relaxing, walking on the beach, swimming or wading.

Winter day-use for Aaron is moderate; with cross-country skiing on park trails and some use of snowmachines. Winter day-use is local in origin.

4.3 Heritage Appreciation

To provide opportunities for residents of Ontario and visitors to increase their knowledge and appreciation of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage.

Aaron is designated as a *self-use* activity park. Self-use parks provide comprehensive information / orientation services as well as self-use facilities such as trails. Regular park staff maintain these facilities. Additional public programs are offered at the discretion of the park superintendent.

Based on the region's natural features and history, interpretive themes have been identified for Aaron Provincial Park. These themes include:

- the ecology of the Canadian Shield and the Boreal Forest, and
- the settlement and tourism history of the park area.

4.4 Scientific Research Objective

To facilitate scientific research and to provide benchmarks to support monitoring of ecological change on the broader landscape.

Ontario's parks play an important role in the provision of places to undertake research activities to: provide a better understanding of park environments, contribute to appropriate park management practices and actions, and provide baseline ecological information that can be used to support ecological monitoring on the broader landscape.

For example, in many parks in the northwest zone, staff establish Ontario Parks Inventory and Monitoring plots (OPIAM) during field work in Provincial Parks (although none have been established in Aaron to date). Baseline information is collected on vegetation, soil, and ecosite types, as well as incidental floral and faunal observations.

5.0 BOUNDARY

Aaron Provincial Park, established in 1958 under Ontario regulation 382/01, is a recreation class park of 117 hectares. The park consists entirely of Crown land.

The following is a brief description of land tenure in the park and surrounding area:

- Aaron Provincial Park is divided by the TransCanada Highway (Hwy 17).
- TransCanada has natural gas pipeline under Crown easement through Aaron on the south side of Highway 17.
- Hydro One has an electricity transmission corridor under the authority of a Land Use Permit through the park.
- Canadian Pacific Railway has a patent right-of-way that divides the southwest corner of the park.
- Lands along the shores of Thunder Lake adjacent to the park are used for private residences, seasonal residences and commercial tourism.

Ontario Parks is committed to an ecosystem approach to park planning and management. The *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act*, which governs activities within provincial parks, pertains only to lands and waters within park boundaries. An ecosystem approach allows park management to consider the relationship between the park and the surrounding environment. Park managers may consider potential impacts on park values and features from activities occurring on adjacent lands, and potential

impacts from park activities on land uses in adjacent areas.

Within the park boundary, the protection of park values and features will be achieved through appropriate zoning, management of land use and activities, education, and monitoring of ecological impacts.

Ontario Parks will support in principle the acquisition of property for addition to the Aaron Provincial Park, if the acquisition will enhance the values of the park. Acquisition or securement will be subject to funding and willingness of the owners to sell or lease their properties or enter into a conservation easement.

If any lands within, nearby or adjacent to the park become available for acquisition, they will be evaluated with regard to their contribution to park objectives and available funding.

6.0 ZONING

Lands within Aaron Provincial Park are zoned in accordance with their environmental and cultural features and values, and their sensitivity to development. It is proposed that Aaron be managed with three types of zones: natural environment, access and development, based on the *Ontario Provincial Parks: Planning and Management Policies* (See Figure 4: Park Zoning). The zones consider the sensitivity of the natural and cultural values, and the permissible degree of development, recreational uses, and management practices within the park.

6.1 Development Zone

Development zones contain areas of the park geared towards the support of intensive day-use and car camping activities. They constitute a relatively small portion of most parks. Development may include roads, visitor control structures, beaches, picnic areas, car campgrounds, commercial service facilities, maintenance facilities, park office and orientation, interpretive, educational, research and management facilities. (See Figure 4: Park Zoning).

D1: Campground and Day-use, 51 hectares

User activity and facility development is concentrated in D1 (Campground and Day-use development zone) which is located in the central portion of the park. Existing development in D1 consists of campgrounds, day-use areas, the Aspen hiking trail and the park administrative complex.

6.2 Access Zones

Access zones serve as staging areas for people, a means of both providing and regulating use in areas of a park geared towards extensive recreation. Generally, development is limited to roads, visitor control structures, and group campgrounds. Provisions may be made for limited orientation, interpretive or educational facilities, for self-use rather than through structured personal service. Limited facilities for research and park management may also be present. (See Figure 4: Park Zoning).

A1: Hydro corridor, 3 hectares

A1 includes the area adjacent to the north side of Highway 17 and includes a 10-metre-wide corridor, measured from the midpoint of the hydro right-of-way.

A2: Pipeline corridor, 10 hectares

A2 includes a 30-metre-wide corridor that includes the pipeline and access road that divides the southern parcels of the park.

6.3 *Natural Environment Zone*

Natural environment zones include natural landscapes which permit the minimum level of development required to support low-intensity recreational activities. This minimum level of development is generally limited to back-country campsites, portages, necessary signage and minimal interpretive facilities. (Refer to Figure 4: Park Zoning).

NE1: Natural Environment, 53 hectares

The NE1 zone constitutes the balance (45%) of the park area that is not included in the development zone or the access zones, including where the park extends into Thunder Lake. The Eastern White Cedar Trail is located in this zone.

7.0 RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP POLICIES

The stewardship of Aaron Provincial Park's natural and cultural resources will conform to the policies identified for recreational class parks in *Ontario Provincial Parks: Planning and Management Guidelines* (1992) and *Ontario's Living Legacy Land Use Strategy* (1999). Additional policy direction is provided in the following section. Planning and management is intended to contribute to the maintenance or enhancement of the ecological integrity of park, a guiding principle of the Act.

Resource stewardship initiatives may be accomplished through partnerships and sponsorships. All resource stewardship activities will be undertaken in accordance with requirements under the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, Environmental Assessment Act* and A *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves.*

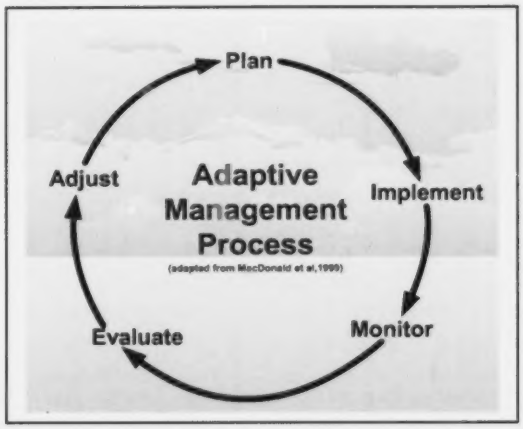

Figure 1: Adaptive management process

An adaptive management approach will be applied to resource management activities within Aaron. Adaptive management allows management strategies to be changed, as required, in response to monitoring and analysis of the results of past actions and experiences.

7.1 *Aboriginal Uses of Natural Resources*

Wabigoon Lake, Wabauskang, Grassy Narrows (English River), Eagle Lake, Ojibway Nation of Saugeen, and Lac Seul First Nations are all within the boundary described by Treaty #3. Aaron Provincial Park overlaps the traditional lands and waters of these six Aboriginal communities, which use the area for hunting, trapping, fishing, wild rice harvesting, other gathering, and travel.

7.2 *Industrial / Commercial Uses*

The following uses are not permitted in Aaron:

- Commercial timber harvest,
- Prospecting, staking mining claims, developing mineral interests, working mines,
- Extraction of sand, gravel, topsoil or peat

- Generation of electricity (except for in-park use).

7.3 Land Management

Management of the park's land base will be directed toward maintaining the natural landscape. A number of land uses/ developments are adjacent to the park (section 5).

No land disposition for private use is permitted.

7.4 Water Management

Water management in the park will maintain water quality and quantity for fisheries habitat and recreational purposes. The park water system is supplied by surface water. Water quality will be monitored on a regular basis in the development zone, in accordance with current Ontario Safe Drinking Water Regulations, and the Ontario Beach Management Protocol.

Surrounding land use does not currently have a direct impact on recreational water quality.

7.5 Forest Fire Management

Aaron Provincial Park is located in the Boreal Forest Fire Management Zone under the *Forest Fire Management Strategy for Ontario* (2004). MNR recognizes fire as an essential ecosystem process, fundamental to restoring and maintaining the ecological integrity of protected areas in the Boreal forest region.

The fire management objectives for Aaron Provincial Park are to prevent loss of life, personal injury and socio-economic disruption, and to minimize loss or damage to park property and infrastructure. Given the capital investment in facilities within the park, and the amount of adjacent development (e.g. the City of Dryden, Highway 17, the CP rail line, the TransCanada Pipeline, hydro transmission corridors, private residences on Thunder Lake), fires in all zones will receive full response and sustained action until extinguished.

Prescribed burning is the deliberate, planned and knowledgeable application of fire by authorized personnel to a specific land area to accomplish pre-determined objectives. Prescribed burning to achieve ecological or hazard reduction objectives may be considered. Plans for any prescribed burning will be developed in accordance with the MNR policy.

7.6 Species at Risk

Species at risk and their habitat will be protected consistent with the *Endangered Species Act*, and its regulations.

There are no known species at risk in the park.

7.7 Vegetation

Management of vegetation within the park will be directed toward maintaining the natural succession of vegetation.

Infestations of forest insects and diseases will be monitored and assessed. Non-native species may be controlled in all zones, and native species may be controlled only in the development and access zones, subject to applicable legislation. If control measures are undertaken, they will be applied to minimize effects on the park ecosystems or for human health and safety purposes in access and development zones.

The removal of hazard trees will be permitted in all zones where safety is a concern (e.g., trails, campgrounds). Areas that are adversely affected by use will be rehabilitated whenever possible using plant species native to the park. Landscaping will be permitted in the development zones; effort will be made to incorporate natural features and exclusive use of native species to restore vegetation.

Brushing along primary and secondary roads as well as along hiking trails will be permitted to improve sight lines and/or traffic flow.

Herbicide applications will be discouraged. Mechanized or hand tending of the Hydro One corridor and the TransCanada pipeline corridor will be encouraged.

Any development that requires the removal of vegetation will be supported by a vegetation inventory, in accordance with approved site plans.

7.8 Wildlife

Hunting is not permitted in Aaron Provincial Park.

A wildlife population(s) may be considered for control when human health or safety risks arise, or when the values for which the park has been established are in jeopardy. Control must be consistent with existing provincial policy direction for wildlife species. Where control is necessary, techniques that have minimal effects on other components of the park's environment will be used. Appropriate methods of population control for wildlife under the mandate of the Fish & Wildlife Conservation Act, may be undertaken directly by Ontario Parks, or through partnership with Ontario Parks.

7.9 Fisheries

Sport fishing occurs on Thunder Lake, adjacent to the park. All fishing activities are subject to provincial and federal fisheries regulations (e.g., *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act* and the *Fisheries Act* (Canada)) as set out in the Ontario Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary.
Thunder Lake is a popular fishing lake, supporting lake trout, walleye and northern pike. Fishing for alternative species will be encouraged, as specified in the Dryden District Fisheries Management Plan.

7.10 Cultural Resources

Cultural resources in Aaron Provincial Park will be managed to ensure their protection, and to provide opportunities for heritage appreciation and research, where these activities do not harm the resource. This will be achieved through zoning and by controlling any recreational activities, development and research that may occur in these areas.

Ontario Parks will consult with nearby First Nations on matters pertaining to Aboriginal history, any sites found within the park associated with Aboriginal culture, interpretation of First Nation's history, and appropriate use of cultural artefacts. The precise location of any found Aboriginal cultural sites, including burial sites will not be disclosed to the public.

In the event of discoveries of archaeological sites, Ontario Parks will work with the Ministry of Culture in the inventory, protection and maintenance of the site. If deemed appropriate for the protection and preservation of cultural resources, such inventory may include excavations of archaeological sites. Excavations by authorized licensed personnel with appropriate research permits will be conducted under the approval and supervision of MNR. Upon completion of an excavation, the site or portions of the site will be returned to their original condition, or will be developed for the purpose of interpreting the cultural resources of the site. The type and extent of such development will be determined by the findings from the excavation.

The removal of artefacts or destruction of historical features is illegal and is prohibited by the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act.*[2]

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[2] 2. (1) No person shall, (b) damage or deface any relic, artifact or natural object or damage or deface any site of archaeological or historical interest in a provincial park. O. Reg. 347/07, s. 2 (1).

7.11 Research

Ontario Parks encourages scientific research by qualified individuals who can contribute to the knowledge of natural and cultural history and to environmental management in provincial parks. All research at Aaron Provincial Park will be conducted by, or authorized by, Ontario Parks. Research projects will be administered through the park and require a research permit. Research must also meet all requirements under applicable provincial and federal legislation. Approved research and monitoring activities must be consistent with *Ontario Parks' Research and Information Strategy (1997).* Temporary facilities in support of approved research and monitoring activities may be considered.

Approved research activities and facilities will be compatible with protection values and/or recreational uses in the park, and will be subject to development and stewardship policies associated with the park's classification unless special permission is given. Sites altered by research activities will be rehabilitated as closely as possible to their previous condition.

7.12 Inventory and Monitoring

Planning and management decisions are intended to contribute to the maintenance or enhancement of the ecological integrity of park. Considerations will be given to allow ecological, social and economic inventory and monitoring to assess affects of use and management. Ontario Parks will ensure that decisions are made with the best available information. Where this information is lacking, Ontario Parks may conduct inventories and monitoring to gather data. Such efforts will be undertaken based on established methodologies and best practices. This will foster an adaptive management approach to protected areas management. The following are broad approaches to identifying inventory and monitoring needs: management actions identified in this management plan; public input; routine park maintenance activities; staff knowledge and experiences, and environmental scans.

8.0 OPERATIONS POLICIES

A park operations plan will be prepared to provide park staff with the necessary direction required to operate the park on a day-to-day basis. In addition to addressing the operations policies that follow, the plan will include such topics as budget, staffing, maintenance schedules, enforcement, and emergency services. The provisions of the plan will be consistent with the approved *Ontario Provincial Parks Minimum Operating Standards*, and will be reviewed annually and updated as required.

8.1 Natural Heritage Education

As outlined in the *Strategic Plan for Natural Heritage Education in Ontario Parks* 2005 – 2010 (2005), the goal of the Natural Heritage Education (NHE) program is to develop visitor awareness and appreciation of Ontario Parks' natural and cultural heritage, fostering a commitment to its protection for all generations. Opportunities to do so will be educational and recreational, formal and informal, and accessible to all people.

The objectives of the NHE program are to provide basic information in all parks; interpretation of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage in provincial parks; and outdoor recreation in representative landscapes in Ontario. There are three levels of NHE service in the Ontario Park's system: *Self-use, Seasonal Activity,* and *Major Activity*. Aaron offers a self-use level of programming. Self-use facility parks provide comprehensive information / orientation services as well as self-use services, such as trails. Park staff maintain these facilities.

A NHE plan and an annual NHE operating plan will be prepared for Aaron. Direction will be taken from provincial policy, the *Northwest*

Zone Natural Heritage Education Plan, and the park management plan. The Aaron NHE plan will be reviewed and updated as required. The scope and intent of all NHE activities will be carefully defined to ensure their compatibility with park features.

8.1.1 Information

The public information program will provide visitors with information about the park and its resources, environment and facilities, the park system and local attractions. This information emphasizes the visitor's role in maintaining the natural environment of the park, appropriate behaviour in the park, safety in the outdoors, and dealing with problem wildlife. Park literature will also advise visitors about commercial services and attractions in the local area and other provincial parks.

8.1.2 Park Interpretation

Self use interpretive facilities will provide park visitors with a greater appreciation for and understanding of the natural features of Aaron Provincial Park. Printed material, self-use facilities and informal personal contact will be the primary means of interpretation. Formal NHE programs are not typically provided in self use parks. Additional public programs and special events are offered at the discretion of the park superintendent. Aaron has a park amphitheatre which is used for special events.

Aaron's primary interpretive themes are:

- the ecology of the Canadian Shield and the Boreal Forest, and
- the settlement and tourism history of the Aaron park area.

8.1.3 Outdoor Recreation

Park visitors will be informed about the opportunities for recreation offered in the park and in the local area. Visitors will be encouraged to use safe boating practices, through the park's information program.

Outdoor recreation skills programs that may be offered will be compatible with maintaining the ecological integrity of the park and the park's interpretive themes, and may include hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, canoeing, camping, geocaching, and orienteering.

8.2 Recreation Management

Recreation management provides a variety of recreational opportunities while aspiring to minimize negative environmental impacts. Recreational activities that are incompatible with the park goal or with specific zones, or the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, are prohibited or restricted. Prevention and control of such activities will be achieved through enforcement, facility design, compliance, and education of park visitors concerning appropriate activities in the park in general and within specific zones.

The campground and day-use areas are operated by the City of Dryden in partnership with the MNR-Ontario Parks. This operational arrangement may change over the years.

8.2.1 Day-Use Area

Aaron is a destination for local residents from Dryden and a stopover for travellers on the TransCanada Highway. Two sandy beaches and playgrounds appeal to day users. The clear, shallow waters of Thunder Lake make Aaron ideal for swimming, boating and fishing.

Day-users participate in picnicking, relaxing, walking on the beach, swimming or wading. The park's day-use facilities are adjacent to Thunder Lake. The sites include picnic tables, a picnic shelter, fireplace grills, water, vault privies and playground equipment. The beach areas offer swimming and beach play. A boat launch is located at the northernmost day use area.

8.2.2 Campgrounds

Aaron Provincial Park has 98 campsites, 39 of which are provided with electrical hook-ups. Approximately one quarter of the sites are pull-through, for trailers and recreational vehicles. There is one group camping area at Aaron, which can accommodate up to 100 people. Refer to Section 10.1 regarding expansion.

Campground amenities include vault privies, a comfort station with shower and laundry facilities, trailer service facilities, water outlets, garbage disposal, recycling depots, and firewood sales.

All campgrounds and campsites will be monitored to ensure their continued ecological and economic viability. This will include necessary improvements to bring them to Ontario Parks operating standards.

Aaron offers a designated number of seasonal leases for sites. These leases are awarded annually through a draw. This practice will be reviewed annually to ensure its continued feasibility to the operating partner. Leased sites will be rotated to minimize cumulative impacts to the sites.

8.2.3 Services for Visitors

Aaron is located in the Sunset Country Travel Area, which spans northwestern Ontario from Fort Frances to Upsala and north to Red Lake and Pickle Lake.

The development of Ontario Parks or private commercial tourism operations such as food and beverage services, recreation equipment rental/sales and retail sales will be determined through business planning, in conjunction with the zone and park marketing plan.

8.2.4 Trails

There are two interpretive/hiking trails in the park: the Aspen Trail (development zone, 1.9 kilometres) and the Eastern White Cedar Trail (natural environment zone, 1.2 kilometres). The Aspen Trail winds through aspen forests, old blow-down and granite outcrops. The Eastern White Cedar Trail meanders through old growth cedar stands, along the shore of Thunder Lake and through some small wetlands. Hiking trails serve as ski trails in winter; they are not mechanically groomed.

8.2.5 Mechanized Travel

Recreational motorized vehicle use, including ATVs and snowmobiles, is prohibited on park hiking/interpretive trails. A local authorized trail that is utilized by snowmobiles runs through the park on specific roads/trails. This trail avoids a dangerous bridge crossing on Hwy 17. The trail is closed to ATVs in summer months (i.e. June, July, and August).

Mountain bikes are permitted on campground roads only; they are not permitted on the park hiking/interpretive trails.

8.3 Partnerships

Ontario Parks has been operating Aaron through a partnership agreement with the City of Dryden since 1997. Ontario Parks will continue to work with the City of Dryden to provide campground operations subject to the regular review and renewal of the partnership agreement.

9.0 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

9.1 Marketing

A marketing plan may be developed for Aaron Provincial Park in accordance with the *Ontario Parks Marketing Plan*, the *Northwest Zone Marketing Plan* and Ontario Parks policy. It will be reviewed and revised as required. Marketing activities will be consistent with the zone and provincial marketing plan.

9.2 Communications

Aaron uses the standard public information program (e.g. parks guide, park tabloid, park maps and the Ontario Parks website). This public information program will be continued.

10.0 DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

All development undertaken by Ontario Parks, or by partners on its behalf, will comply with *A Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves*, and will be carried out in accordance with approved site and development plans that meet development standards for provincial parks.

Areas proposed for significant development will require prior assessment for significant cultural heritage features and natural values - such as species at risk - to ensure these values are identified and protected at the site.

10.1 Campgrounds / Campsites

The campground at Aaron may be expanded by as many as 20 sites, with associated infrastructure, if the demand for such facilities becomes evident.

10.2 Roads

The construction of new roads, bridges and utility corridors for park purposes will be directed by approved implementation and site plans. Such projects will be permitted in the development zones only. Construction will be closely monitored.

10.3 Day Use Area

Ontario Parks will continue to monitor the quality of the day-use area. Development in the day-use area will focus on:

- Re-design and re-development to improve quality and operational effectiveness; and,
- A limited amount of new development to provide additional day-use opportunities (i.e., picnic shelters).

Where user conflicts or operational inefficiencies exist, separation of day-use and camper activity may be undertaken.

10.4 Trails

The construction of new trails in the natural environment and development zones will be subject to approved site plans.

10.5 Maintenance and Administrative Areas

The park warehouse, office and gatehouse will be upgraded / replaced as required, subject to available resources.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

Park development, operations and resource stewardship will be contingent upon the availability of funding and unforeseeable changes in priorities or policy. Implementation of the management plan and operation of the park will meet the requirements of the *Environmental Assessment Act*, *Environmental Bill of Rights*, *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act*, *Endangered Species Act* and other pertinent legislation.

All aspects of park management, development and operation will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of *A Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves*.

Park development proposals will be phased in as follows:

11.1 Stage One

- Replacement and / or upgrading of park facilities as required.
- Preparation of a Natural Heritage Education plan.
- Preparation of a park marketing plan/strategy.
- Annual review of the operating plan, the business plan

12.0 SUMMARY OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Public consultation is an important part of the Aaron park management planning process.

➢ Phase 1 - Invitation to Participate; Terms of Reference October 2, 2006 – November 16, 2006

The Invitation to Participate and to Review the Approved Terms of Reference stage included newspaper advertisements, distribution to the mandatory contact list and to known stakeholders, an environmental registry proposal notice, distribution to park, zone and district offices, and Ministry of Natural Resources Information Centre in Peterborough.

Two written comments were received at the Northwest zone office from October 2 to November 16.

➢ Phase 2 - Preliminary Management Plan

The public will have an opportunity to review the preliminary management plan for a minimum period of forty-five (45) days after its formal release. This will allow interested participants to comment on proposals in the plan.

13.0 PLAN AMENDMENT AND REVIEW

The park management plan can be reviewed or amended to address changing issues or conditions. At ten year intervals, this plan will be examined for the need for a review or amendment.

A review may involve a reassessment of all or part of the plan, including classification, zoning, goal, objectives and all resource management, operations and development policies.

An amendment can be considered to address specific issues or needs.

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Appendix I SPECIES LIST

Plants:

aspen (*Populus tremuloides*)
balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*)
black spruce (*Picea mariana*)
Canada yew (*Taxus canadensis*)
jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*)
nodding trillium (*trillium cernuum*)
red pine (*Pinus resinosa*)
white birch (*Betula papyrifera*)
white spruce (*Picea glauca)*
wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*)

Mammals:

beaver (*Castor canadensis*)
black bear (*Ursus americanus*)
lynx (*Lynx canadensis*)
moose (Alces alces)
American marten (*Martes americana*)
red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)
river otter (*Lutra canadensis*)
snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*)
timber wolf (*Canis lupus*)
white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

Fish:

lake whitefish (*Coregonus clupeaformis*)
northern pike (*Esox lucius*)
smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*)
walleye (*Stizostedion vitreum vitreum)*

Aaron
1:1,700,000
Legend
Major Municipality
First Nation Community
Highway
Railway
International Border
Provincial Park
Lake
U.S.A.
State Park
Ontario
N
WOODLAND CARIBOU
Trout Lake
TROUT LAKE
Red Lake
Red Lake
105
Slate Falls
Lake St. Joseph
PAKWASH
Ear Falls
Sydney Lake
ST. RAPHAEL LAKE
Wabauskang
MAYNARD LAKE
WEST ENGLISH RIVER
TIDE LAKE
WINDIGO POINT
Lac Seul
Ojibway Nation of Saugeen
English River
Grassy Narrows
Lac Seul
Savant Lake
WABAKIMI
Hudson
Sioux Lookout
OJIBWAY
Dalles
BLUE LAKE
Vermilion Bay
72
MINNITAKI LAKES
Kenora
EAGLE-DOGTOOTH
WINNANGE LAKE
Dryden
LOLA LAKE
599
Silver Dollar
EAST ENGLISH RIVER
RUSHING RIVER
Eagle Lake
BUTLER LAKE
AARON PROVINCIAL PARK
BRIGHTSAND RIVER
Lake of the Woods
Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation
71
SANDBAR LAKE
Ignace
SIOUX NARROWS
Whitefish Bay
BONHEUR RIVER KAME
Ojibways of Onegaming
Nestor Falls
TURTLE RIVER-WHITE OTTER LAKE
LAKE OF THE WOODS
CALIPER LAKE
Big Grassy
SABERT ISLANDS
CRANBERRY LAKE
AGASSIZ PEATLANDS
SPRUCE ISLANDS
Naicatchewenin
Mine Centre
Seine River
Atikokan
Rainy River
Couchiching
Rainy Lake
Nicickousemenecaning
Barwick
Emo
Rainy River
SANDPOINT ISLAND
Fort Frances
U.S.A.
Lac La Croix
QUETICO
LA VERENDRYE RIVER
Boundary Waters
Canoe Area Wilderness

Figure 3

Adjacent Land Use

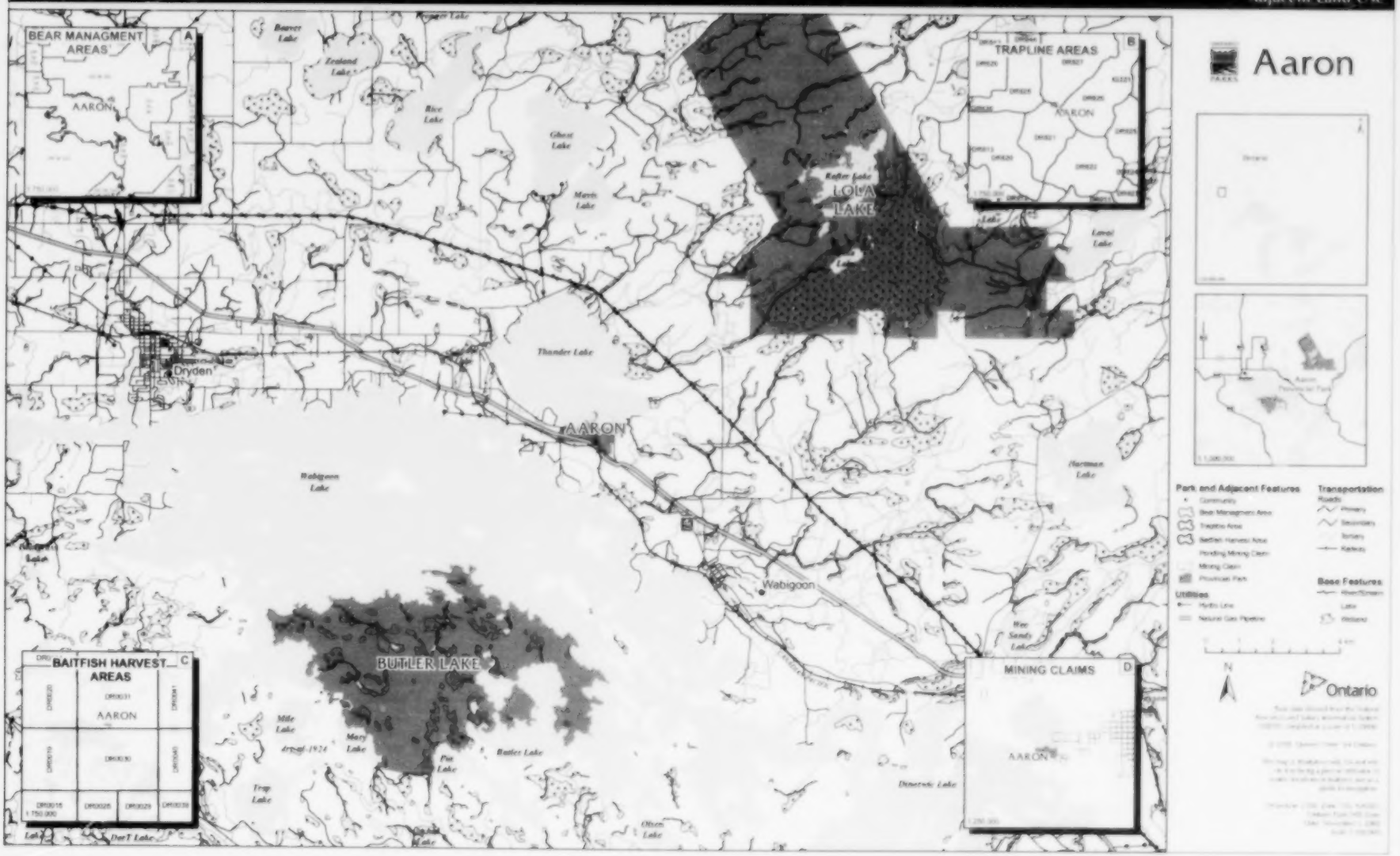

Figure 4 Zoning and Development

Aaron

0 125 250 500 m

Scale 1:10,000

Legend

- River/Stream
- Local Hydro Lines
- Park Roads
- Major Highway
- Secondary Road
- Tertiary Road
- Snowmobile Trail
- Nature Trails
- Canadian Pacific Railway
- Trans Canada Pipeline
- Lake

Proposed Park Zoning

- Development
- Natural Environment (Lake Bed)
- Natural Environment
- Access

Ontario

Base data derived from the Natural Resources and Values Information System (NRVIS) compiled at a scale of 1:20000.

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This map is illustrative only. Do not rely on it as being a precise indicator of routes, locations or features, nor as a guide to navigation.

Projection: UTM, Zone 15N, NAD83
Ontario Parks Northwest Zone
Date: October 2009